



State of Arizona

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
May 17, 2012

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Governor Jan Brewer Announces Breakthrough Agreement in Arnold v. Sarn Behavioral Health Case

Deal Improves Mental Health Services, Sets Stage for Potential Settlement in 2014

PHOENIX – Governor Jan Brewer today stood with plaintiffs to announce and sign an agreement in the 1981 Arnold v. Sarn case regarding State-supported care and services for individuals with Serious Mental Illness.

The agreement, which awaits court approval, would last two years. During that time, the State and plaintiffs will build upon the accepted framework for services and recovery, while allowing time to see the legal resolution of the federal Affordable Care Act and its likely impact upon the behavioral health system.

"Everyone who knows me understands that behavioral health issues are near and dear to my heart, so I am thrilled that we are able to announce this agreement in an Arizona case that has lingered for more than three decades," said Governor Brewer. "This isn't lip service. With this agreement, we have made real reforms in care and added real resources – \$39 million next year alone – to improve the lives of Arizonans living with Serious Mental Illness. It has been a long time coming, but I'm proud this day is finally here."

More than 30 years ago, Arnold v. Sarn was filed in Superior Court as a special action on behalf of a class of indigent individuals with Serious Mental Illness. They sought judgment against the Arizona Department of Health Services, the Arizona State Hospital and Maricopa County Board of Supervisors – arguing that these entities had breached State law by failing to create a comprehensive system of community-based mental health care. The case languished in the courts for years – until today.

"Persons with Serious Mental Illness and their families suffered significant cuts in necessary services during the State's recent economic downturn," said attorney Anne Ronan, who represents the plaintiffs in this case. "This agreement is a significant step to restoring critical community-based services designed to promote class members' recovery and their integration in the community."

With today's announcement, the State and plaintiffs have agreed to a menu of community-based services that will be provided to individuals with Serious Mental Illness. State funding is included to support programs such as: Crisis Services; Employment and Housing Assistance; Case Management; Family and Peer Support; Life Skills Training; Respite Care and Medication Services. Also incorporated are national best-practice models and standards for behavioral health to ensure that individuals receive the care they need.

While this two-year agreement does not conclude the legal proceedings with Arnold v. Sarn, it does represent a significant breakthrough as the State and plaintiffs seek final resolution. By establishing specific standards of care for Arizonans with behavioral health needs, the agreement provides a roadmap to eventually conclude the litigation.

“This is a momentous day. I’m grateful to everyone involved – including my policy and legal team, the Arizona Department of Health Services, Maricopa County and counsel for the plaintiffs – for their patience and willingness to work in good faith toward this agreement,” said Governor Brewer. “I’m also thankful to the Arizona Legislature, led by Speaker of the House Andy Tobin and Senate President Steve Pierce, for demonstrating commitment to these critical health services with the investment of real dollars.

“Lastly,” Governor Brewer continued, “I commend Charles ‘Chick’ Arnold – the original plaintiff in this case. It meant a lot to me that he came today to stand with us in announcing this agreement. He has devoted his life to improving Arizona’s behavioral health system, and today’s accomplishment would not have been possible without his efforts.”

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